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ABSTRACT

In seeking to understand the historic, cultural context of citizen participation, one looks to the roots of the concept of citizenship. Both Aristotle and Plato describe the ideal of citizenship in terms of participation. A citizen is one who belongs to and in the community. The concept of community is one of shared location, values, language, and activities. Since citizen participation takes place within the broader community, it takes place in an atmosphere which enhances the possibility of successful communication, negotiations, and collective action. To Plato our contemporary concept of citizen participation would have seemed very strange. He could not have conceived of public life without the participation of citizens and, except in the direct emergencies of war, he was opposed to government intervention. The early Roman and Greek city state did not evolve into the modern state easily because it was based in a particularism in both religion and culture which did not provide for the absorption of outsiders. It was the invention of a state religion which accepted strangers into the culture which permitted the expansion of Rome from city state to empire. Saint Augustine analogized a dual citizenship, one to the heavenly city, the other to the earthly. Both the word authority and the notion of the state deriving its authority from a collective, implicit grant of authority by the people come from Hobbs. Citizen participation is a group and not an individual phenomenon. Benefits are distributed to individuals in terms of their relative power within the group and of their group's effectiveness. Writers on citizen participation appear universally to subscribe to the notion that alienation is reducible by individual and group action within existing society and that citizen participation is a useful tool for that purpose. (RM)

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# *A Philosophic and Social Theory Perspective on Citizen Participation*

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*The values and goals of citizen participation are as old and as fundamental to democratic politics as is the concept of republican government. What has changed is the nature of government. In Plato's Republic and in the ideas of the founding fathers, the representatives and the government were one. In the modern bureaucratic state, administration far overshadows the representative elements of government. As bureacratic power increased, the extent and meaning of representation is in question. To Plato, an inactive, nonparticipating citizen is a contradiction in terms and the epitome of sound and healthy government is but an extension of its active citizenry.*

*Citizen participation takes place in the context of specific institutions. Since those institutions and their leaders compete with others for funds (survival), power and prestige, citizen participation is a tool for developing new and/or stronger constituencies and coalitions with which those institutions can pursue their ends.*

*Although the phrase citizen participation uses words which evoke images of an interaction between the general citizenry and government, ranging from the near passivity of simple response to questions to complete citizen control, to the involvement of clients of a wide range of administrative agencies, occasionally at the state or regional, but most frequently at the local, municipal and even the neighborhood level.*

*On the one hand the phrase is a slogan associating a set of administrative practices with democratic and professional root values derived from social philosophy, the helping professions, and research in the social sciences. On another hand, it is a set of specific rules, policies and practices in a series of bureaucracies with direct service delivery mandates, each the child of legislative and administrative compromise. And, finally it is a political and administrative tool of many purposes for organizations with constituencies both public and private. Within this range the precise meaning and intent of citizen participation may vary from program to program, from one implementing agent to another, from one jurisdiction to another and from individual actor to actor.*

*The emphasis on citizen participation activities has sought to counter the autocratic elements involved in the growth of the bureaucracy by attempting to democratize administrative activities. Public sector employment (a general measure of bureaucratic growth) has been the fastest growing sector of the U. S. labor market.*

*In seeking to understand the historic, cultural context of citizen participation, one looks to the roots of the concept of citizenship. A citizen is a person in context; one who exists within a political entity and to whom that entity has defined responsibilities. Citizenship is the role of a person who is a full participant, as an individual, in the actions of the political entity according to its rules. Citizen participation, then is rooted in three concepts: (I) that of the individual as a part of a community, (2) that of a community as a social unit, and (3) that of action on behalf of (and perhaps by) the individual through the collectivity.*

*Students of Political Science for two millennia have begun their education with*

*Aristotle whose definition of a citizen suggest, "The citizen in . . . the strict sense is best defined by the one criterion 'a man who shares in the administration of justice and in the holding of office.'"*[1] *Both Aristotle and Plato describe the ideal of citizenship in terms of participation -- participation in the search for wisdom in public affairs and in the conversion of that wisdom into policy. In this vision, participation is a continual civic vocation which is in turn the hallmark of the citizen. Plato, more the philosopher and less the scientist than Aristotle, was content to present this view; but Aristotle, in cataloguing the constitutions of the Greek city-states and describing their political cultures, could not escape the fact that holders of citizenship, actual citizens, were not much like the ideal. There was a disparity between the behavior of those who were content with the status of citizen and those who were inclined towards the duties of citizenship.*

*Never is the nature of citizenship as complex for the individual as when he dissents from the state, yet that situation points to another key facet of citizenship: a citizen is one who belongs to and in the community. Thus, the dissentor and the individual whose interests are not best served by the actions of the state must come to terms with the tensions produced by these facts. A failure to come to terms leads to deviant behavior and alienation.*

*The concept of community is one of shared location, values, attitudes, activities, language and, frequently, government. Since citizen participation takes place within the broader community, it takes place in a location fixed, not only in space and time, but also in values, attitudes, and concepts, all of which enhance the possibility of successful communication; negotiation; and mutually satisfactory collective action.*

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1 *The Politics of Aristotle, edited and translated by Ernest Barker, Oxford University Press, Cambridge, 1962, p. 95.*

*The origin of recorded political thought lies with the Greeks. They were much concerned with the question of citizenship and of the responsibilities of the citizen to the state and of the state to the citizen. The Greeks believed that all things, including social roles, had essential natures. They approached the definitional problem by seeking to discover the essence of citizenship and of community. In modern times we are more concerned with Plato and Aristotle as thinkers than with others, at least in part because their works came to us in more complete form, and also in part because they concerned republican forms of government and speculated in areas that seem more contemporary.*

*The city-state represented to Plato one of the great achievements of civilization. It represented in fact the capacity for civilization in as much as prior to the existence of the city-state relations between people were limited to family and tri-tribal relations.*

*To Plato our contemporary concept of citizen participation would have seemed very strange. He could not have conceived of public life without the participation of citizens and, except in the direct emergencies of war, he was opposed to the government getting into situations in which citizens were not active and equal contributors. But participation in the state and participation in some of its affairs were not always the same thing. In the case of participation in the government as a whole, the collective good was paramount. But participation in a specific activity might flow from private interest. Aristotle said,*

> *All communities are like parts of the political community (or state). Men combine with an eye to some advantage or to provide some of the necessities of like, and we think of the political community as having initially come together and as enduring to secure the advantage (of its members). This is indeed the goal which lawgivers aim at, and men call 'just' what is to the common advantage. Now all other*

> *forms of community aim at some partial advantage. Sailors associate for the advantage seafaring brings in the form of making money. Soldiers . . .* [2]

*The early Roman and Greek city state did not evolve into the modern state easily because it was based in a particularism in both religion and culture which did not provide for the absorption of outsiders. It was the invention of a state (as opposed to a local) religion which permitted the expansion of Rome from city-state to empire. That invention permitted the acceptance of strangers into the culture and, in turn, made it possible for the culture and its instrument, the state to reach out.* [3]

*Saint Augustine analogized a dual citizenship, one to the heavenly city, the other to the earthly:*

> *. . .a pilgrim on earth . . .lives (while it is here on earth) as if it were in captivity, and having received the promise of redemption, and divers spiritual gifts as seals thereof, it willingly obeys such laws of the temporal city as order the things pertaining to the sustenance of this mortal life . .*
>
> *This celestrial society while it is here on earth, increases itself out of all languages, being unconcerned by the different temporal laws that are made; yet not breaking but observing their diversity in divers nation, so long as they tend unto the preservation of earthly peace, and do not oppose the adoration of one God alone.* [4]

*Both the word authority and the notion of the state deriving its authority from a collective, implicit grant of authority by the people come from Hobbs.*

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2 *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, translated and with an introduction by Martin Ostwald. Bobbs-Merrill, New York: 1962, p. 232.*

3 *Fustell Decoulanges, The Ancient City, Doubleday Anchor, Garden City: 1954.*

4 *Saint Augustine, The City of God, Everyman's Library, E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1962, Vol. II, p.254 - 255.*

> *I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition that those give up the right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner . . .*

*Hobbs believed firmly in the baseness of man and in the impossibility of perfecting him. He saw the state as a leviathan that man had erected to sit on top of his nature. Citizenship then in Hobbs' view is a form of insurance, a hedge that man develops against his own.*

*In the study of representation and political participation, political science makes a distinction between legal and normative theory and behavioral theory. Within behavioral theory there is a further distinction between approaches which attempt to explain behavior in terms of the rate and manner of political participation and those which study behavior in terms of the allocation of benefits. Normative and legal theory is rooted in the U. S. Constitution which, itself, emerged from a classic compromise between majoritarian thought and the need to protect minority rights. Representation in the federal lower house is based on population and that in the upper house is based on the sovereignty of the states. This original context has been considerably modified, however, both by the change to the popular election of Senators and the 14th Amendment.*

*The essential function of government is the creation of a set of power relationships to the end that a portion of the population may make decisions on behalf of the total population.*

*Proceeding from the basic principle that government is a device for decision making in which a portion of the whole achieves closure for the rest, one can see that, despite the Constitutional protection of certain rights, there can be no such thing in law as absolute rights. It is a fact, however, that the doctrine of inalienable rights and of minority rights is deeply rooted in American political thought. So too, is a questioning of the legitimacy of the minority control that the very existence of this governmental form implies. In response to these themes American normative political theory stresses*

*the need for separated and checked powers within government. Or, as Madison put it "Dependence on the people is, no doubt the primary control on government," but all "experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary percautions."*[5] *Madison looked with concern at the process of decisionmaking in government fearing, its necessary minority rule.*

> *By a faction, I understand the number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion or of interests, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent or aggregated interest of the community.*[6]

*Madison felt that some protection was provided by the fact that the nation was organized on such a large scale. This he thought would limit the ability of factions to form and, once formed, to rule*

> *Extend the sphere, and you take in greater variety of parties and interests: you make it less probable that the majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens. For if such a common motive exists it would be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength and to act in unison with each other.*[7]

*It appears that participation is a group and not an individual phenomenon. It appears that benefits are not distributed to individuals in direct proportion to their participation in the system but, rather, in terms of their relative power within the group and of the effectiveness of the group or groups to which they belong. It appears to be true that participation rates are a function of benefits received.*

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5 *Either Alexander Hamilton or James Madison, The Federalist, Number 51, Tutor Publishing Co., New York: 1947, pp.354 - 355.*

6 *James Madison, The Federalist, Number 10, p. 63.*

7 *Ibid., p. 69.*

*Contemporary social and political theory rests heavily upon the tendency of people to form groups for their own support, protection and goal enhancement. In general, social theory develops a hierarchical ranking model of society according to the degree of involvement in or exclusion from society. Writers on citizen participation differ somewhat on methods, but appear universally to subscribe to the notion that alienation is reducible by individual and group action within existing society and that citizen participation is a useful tool for that purpose.*

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